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ABSTRACT

During fall 1987, the National Conference of State Legislatures contacted the education and higher education committee chairs in every state legislature to ask them about emerging issues. Financing education remains the paramount concern, and the teaching profession and governance are also guaranteed a place in legislative debate. Other areas identified through this survey have emerged during recent sessions. Legislators and the public want their tax dollars to produce a quality education system. Hence, the resulting interest in accountability will endure into the next decade, as will the emphasis on education reform even though it has shifted from passing reform legislation to maintaining legislated reforms and making them work. Issues to watch for during the upcoming sessions include restructuring schools, early childhood education, minority and disadvantaged youth, and money for technology in schools. Tables provide rankings of top issues by state as well as state listings of top issues in 1988. (SI)

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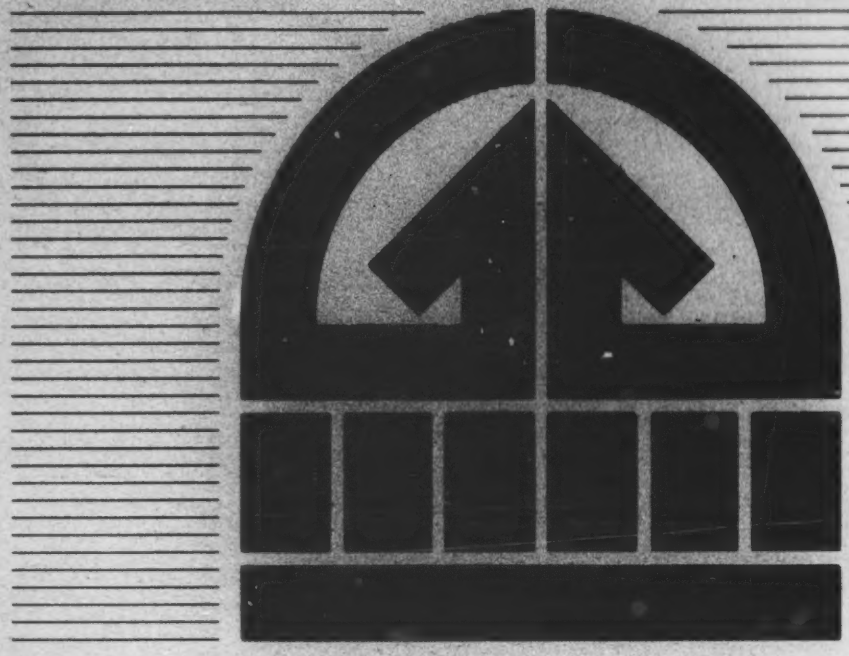

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STATE ISSUES SERIES

EMERGING ISSUES: A SURVEY OF EDUCATION COMMITTEE CHAIRS

by

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Vol. 13, No. 3 January 1988

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INTRODUCTION

The sage who once said, "The more things change, the more they stay the same," could have been speaking about the education concerns of state legislatures. Year after year the NCSL education survey has identified the same top issues: school finance, teachers and teaching, and governance. This is not surprising since these issues reflect the legitimate education interests of the legislature--money and accountability.

As stewards of the taxpayers' money and interests, legislators are charged with ensuring that their top budget item--education--produces desired results. Their concern translates into a plethora of legislation and legislative activities that are focused on efficient education systems. The results of this survey demonstrate the diverse ways in which legislatures are responding to the public demands for a quality education system.

During the fall of 1987, the NCSL education program staff contacted the education and higher education committee chairs in every state legislature to ask them about emerging issues. The survey asked each chair to select the three issues most likely to be addressed in 1988.

The data collected from the survey and subsequent phone contacts with the committee chairs were then categorized and the most frequently occurring issues were identified, ranked and synthesized into this report.

FINANCES--THE PRIMARY CONCERN

Financing education is a prime responsibility of state legislatures. As expected, money concerns are the top ranked category. In this survey the majority of chairs identified some aspect of school finance for either K-12 or higher education as one of the most important issues they will face in the 1988 session. In general, during 1988 the legislatures will address three key school financial issues: 1) where to get money; 2) how to best allocate it; and 3) how to best evaluate its use. These concerns tend to manifest themselves in various ways throughout the states. Examining the states' share of funding education, for example, will be one area that will be discussed in many states.

Elementary and Secondary Education. In an era of fiscal austerity, the challenge of allocating education money efficiently is essential. As anticipated, nine states mentioned that in 1988 reassessing their school finance formula would be a priority in 1988. Both Arizona and Mississippi expect to examine formulas for two-year colleges. Eleven states indicated that they want to examine equitable distribution of their funds. In some cases this scrutiny may produce changes in a state's finance formula. This number is a decline from the 16 states that listed equity as a priority in 1987 and the 13 that examined some aspect of their school finance formula last year.

Securing adequate funds for education, whether it be for general purposes or funding particular programs, is still a top concern. Not surprisingly, 30 states believe this will be a primary issue facing their legislatures.

Sources of Funding. Determining who will pay for education and how much they should pay is a fundamental concern of legislatures. Fifteen chairs

identified examining the state/local share of funding as a top priority during the 1988 sessions. Of these, Alabama plans to consider an increase in their local portion of revenues for schools; California expects to review restrictions on state spending levels; and Ohio will be addressing increases in state revenues used for education. This represents a decline from 1987 when 21 states focused on the distribution of costs for education at state and local levels.

According to chairs from nine states, examining tax rate procedures for education money or debating changes in property taxes will be a priority in their states during 1988. Of these, Illinois will look at ways to create less reliance on local property taxes and Wisconsin will focus possibly on increasing sales taxes to compensate for reductions in property taxes. Only five states identified this issue in 1987.

Higher Education. Funding post-secondary education is also important to legislatures. Issues include generating revenues, funding particular programs and paying faculty salaries. Chairs from 13 states expect general funding to be a priority during the 1988 session. This represents a decrease from the previous year, when chairs from 17 states identified funding for higher education as a priority.

College Aid. As tuition rates escalate, concerns about affordable college education also increase. Many states are therefore exploring savings investment programs or prepaid tuition plans designed to encourage savings for college. Chairs from nine states expect student financial aid to be a top issue in 1988. Of those, Connecticut, Minnesota and Missouri plan to look at savings investment programs. For 1987, financial aid was a priority in seven states, four of which considered prepaid tuition plans.

TEACHERS AND TEACHING--THE SECOND PRIORITY

The past several years have witnessed a wide range of legislation relating to the teaching profession. Much of this can be attributed to recognition that teachers and teaching must be at the heart of any attempt to reform education. Consequently, this category was the second most frequently mentioned in the 1988 survey. It revealed that legislators are generally concerned with: 1) salaries and incentive pay; 2) enhancements to the teaching profession; and 3) teacher training and evaluation.

Wages. Chairs from sixteen states expect that teacher salaries will be a key issue in 1988. Improving salaries either by equalizing wages across districts or raising the minimum salaries statewide was mentioned by several chairs. Establishing or revising career ladders for teachers was identified by chairs in five states. This demonstrates a substantial increase from 1987, when wages were priorities in 10 states.

Only Colorado and Wisconsin identified salaries for faculty at the higher education level as a priority in 1988, similar to 1987 when three states identified faculty salaries as a top issue.

Enhancements. Upgrading the teaching profession by means other than increasing wages is a challenge for the legislature. Chairs in four states will be addressing teaching enhancements in 1988. Florida will be exploring ways to enhance workplace decisionmaking opportunities and incentives; and,

Indiana and Pennsylvania will be considering teacher quality programs. In 1987 five states worked to enhance the teaching profession.

Training and Certification. In an attempt to secure better prepared teachers, legislatures are debating changing teacher training or certification requirements. Eleven states expect this issue to generate strong debate during the 1988 session. Illinois and Oklahoma, for instance, will explore a five-year teaching preparation program. Of the 10 states that addressed these issues last session, two of them considered five-year teaching preparation programs.

Evaluation. Measuring the quality of teaching is another area of legislative interest. Chairs from five states indicated that they will be looking at new ways to evaluate teacher performances. Teacher standards and practices are expected to be addressed by two states. The survey revealed increasing interest in this area, as only two states identified it as a priority in 1987.

Administrators. In contrast to the widespread attention given teachers, school administrators were mentioned infrequently. The survey revealed that during 1988 chairs from only two states, Colorado and Idaho, will examine issues concerning training and licensing of administrators. Last session, four states cited administrators as a priority.

GOVERNANCE--THE THIRD PRIORITY

Legislatures are charged with guaranteeing effective governance of the educational system at the elementary, secondary and post-secondary levels. Two governance areas for grades K-12 are expected to receive attention during the 1988 session: school district reorganization, and the relationship between the governing bodies of the overall education system. According to the survey, interest in this area is increasing. Chairs from 23 states identified governance of either K-12 or higher education as a top priority in 1988 while only 17 chairs mentioned it in 1987.

Governing Bodies. Delivery of services and determining who governs that delivery is a focal point for discussion among legislators. The effort to ensure that education is governed effectively is intensifying. During the 1988 session seven states expect to review the role or selection of either the chief state school officer, state department of education, or state or local school boards. Georgia will be examining the role of the local board in tax assessments. Kansas will look at the selection and responsibilities of the state board. And Indiana, Mississippi and North Carolina all expect to discuss changing the selection process for their chief state school officers.

Consolidation. One of the most emotionally charged issues for legislatures to confront is consolidation--the "C" word. Enrollment decline will influence six states to address school district reorganization or consolidation in 1988. Increased fiscal constraints have caused some legislatures to consider ways to encourage schools to share classes or other educational services. The chairs from Iowa, Minnesota and Vermont mentioned that they will consider district reorganization, while chairs from Kentucky and Utah indicated they will look at district consolidation. One indication of how emotional this issue can be is the fact that the same states identified these same issues last session.

Higher Education. Governance of higher education programs will be a top priority in 11 states during 1988. This represents a significant increase from 1987, when only six listed it. Among the states planning action in 1988 are Georgia, which wants to restructure its university system; Texas, which plans to establish specific roles for specific institutions; and Wisconsin, which hopes to examine the various aspects of two- and four-year colleges.

In addition, chairs from Hawaii and Nebraska indicated that during their 1988 sessions they want to find ways to link the higher education community to economic development.

ACCOUNTABILITY--INCREASING IMPORTANCE

There is a nationwide interest in holding schools, students and educators accountable for the outcomes of the education process. General interest in accountability is growing. In 1987, chairs from 11 states ranked accountability as a top category; in 1988, 17 identified it.

States use a variety of methods for evaluating their education systems. The survey indicates that several states will be reviewing their accountability systems in some fashion. In 1988 Alabama will examine accountability in school finance, and Connecticut will explore a professional standards board for teachers. Montana will be designing student assessment tests in 1989.

Chairs from seven states indicated that teacher standards or evaluations will be a priority in 1988. This is an increase from the 1987 survey when chairs from three states ranked it as a top issue.

According to the chairs, other aspects of accountability are likely to be addressed in 1988 as well. In Kentucky school-based performance standards will be discussed, in Minnesota education effectiveness will be addressed and in New Jersey an assessment of state universities and colleges is planned.

REFORM--MAINTAINING THE MOMENTUM--PRIORITY FIVE

Education reform, especially maintaining the momentum for initiatives previously enacted, is another category that was ranked high by the chairs. The continued interest in this area reflects a number of changes, including a greater state role in education, a more activist approach in the education arena by legislators, and widespread concern about America's education system.

Maintaining the momentum for initiatives established by earlier reform measures, or determining long-range education goals continues to be a matter of legislative concern. Fifteen chairs mentioned that they expect reform-related issues to surface during their 1988 sessions. For instance, Arizona will monitor the implementation of an education reform package passed in 1984. Hawaii will explore new education initiatives. Iowa will develop new standards for school districts. Massachusetts will monitor the implementation of its school improvement program and will develop new reform initiatives, including financial bonuses for improved student learning, Michigan will explore a more stringent core curriculum designed to produce better critical thinking skills among students. South Carolina will explore possible revisions of its 1984 reforms. And Vermont will look at new methods for staffing schools.

AT-RISK: PRIORITY SIX

Programs for students at risk of dropping out of school are continuing to gain national attention, and legislatures are beginning to respond to this issue by funding special programs for at-risk students as well as students who have already dropped out of school. Emphasizing early intervention as a way to prevent students from dropping out of school and designing alternatives to traditional high schools are examples of actions in the states.

Fourteen chairs ranked this issue as a priority for 1988, whereas 11 identified it last session. Among these, Iowa and Michigan expect to discuss early intervention programs, Mississippi is exploring a compensatory vocational education program to help students who are unable to meet the graduation requirements established in 1986, Oregon will refine the "Youth Initiative" program established in 1987, and Texas will look at prevention initiatives and programs for students who have **already** dropped out.

THE BEST OF THE REST

Special Education. Results from the survey indicated that there is a continuing need for special education funding and programs; chairs from 13 states indicated that this issue will be a priority in 1988. Only 10 listed it in 1987. The issue takes different shapes from state to state. The general emphasis will be on funding, although other aspects, such as programs for handicapped students and improved quality of services, will also be examined.

Facilities. Construction, renovation and improvement of educational facilities were cited by chairs from eight states as likely topics for debate during the 1988 session. And while examining the state portion of cost reimbursement to local districts for construction and renovation was cited as a top issue by four states in 1987, only Maryland expects to address it in 1988. Considering increasing funds and examining general expenditures will be the main focus in this area.

AIDS/Sex Education. Despite the nationwide interest and rhetoric about AIDS education, chairs from only seven states expect AIDS to be a top issue in 1988. Five cited it for 1987. Legislative concern about AIDS generally focuses on mandating AIDS education in the schools or school admission policies for children with AIDS. In most cases, legislators opt to leave curriculum and content decisions to the discretion of school districts.

Early Childhood Education. Educational programs for preschool children were cited as a priority issue by six states. For example, Florida will focus on programs for indigent children; New York expects to concentrate on preschool and day care for the handicapped; and Maine will be conducting the first major study in 20 years of preschool programs and school-age entrances.

CONCLUSION

Legislative interest in education remains keen and is focused on those areas that most strongly affect the quality of our education system. Among these, financing education remains the paramount concern, and the teaching profession and governance are also guaranteed a place in legislative debate.

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Other areas identified through this survey have emerged during recent sessions. Legislators and the public want their tax dollars to produce a quality education system. Hence, the resulting interest in accountability will endure into the next decade, as will the emphasis on education reform even though it has shifted from passing reform legislation to maintaining legislated reforms and making them work.

Issues to watch for during the upcoming sessions include restructuring schools, early childhood education, minority and disadvantaged youth, and money for technology in schools.

Of these, restructuring may find a place in the spotlight as states search for ways to encourage innovative changes in curriculum, teaching and governance. Some states, including Connecticut, Massachusetts and Washington, have already implemented legislation that provides incentives to promote innovation in school districts.

Concentrated services for special student populations, designed to improve their chances of succesfully completing school, are also gaining ground. This interest is being fueled by national studies that demonstrate the importance of early childhood education programs. Similarly, programs for minority and disadvantaged youth will also be explored as the demographics of the American population continue to change.

TABLE 1
Rankings of Top Issues by State, 1988
*No Regular Session in 1988

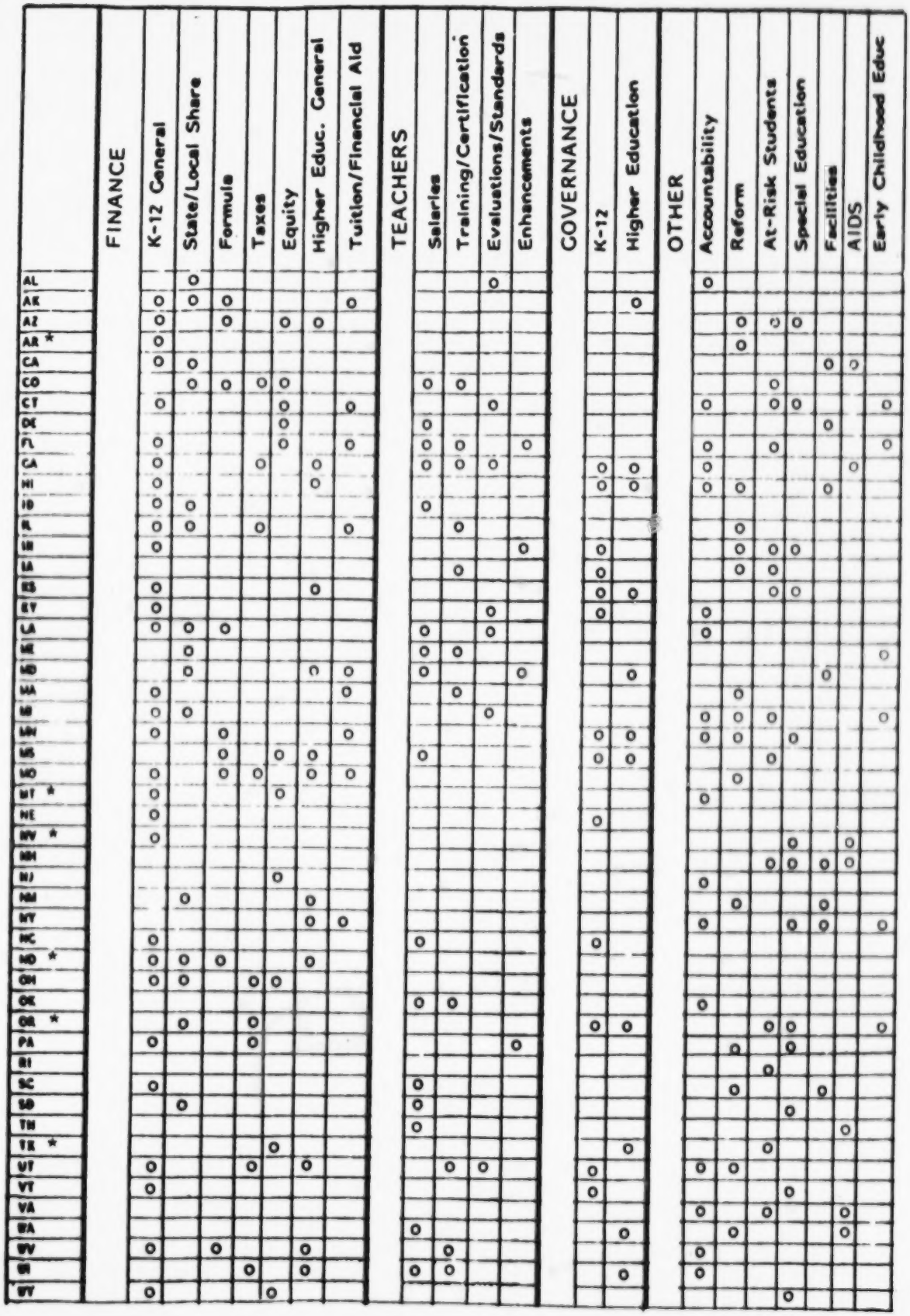

TABLE II
STATE LISTINGS OF TOP ISSUES FOR 1988
* No Regular Session In 1988

(Number in parenthesis indicates the number of respondents in each state)

ALABAMA (1)

- School finance: local revenues, accountability
- Teacher evaluation
- Teacher tenure law update

ALASKA (3)

- Funding: adequacy, state/local share
- Abolishing corporal punishment
- University governance, student loans
- Foundation finance formula
- Children and Youth Commission

ARIZONA (2)

- Statewide goals for K-12 education
- School finance formula: equity
- Community college funding formula
- Services to special populations

ARKANSAS (2) *

- School finance: adequacy
- Education reform: funds, momentum
- Adult literacy

CALIFORNIA (2)

- Funding: adequacy, state spending limits
- AIDS education
- School facilities

COLORADO (2)

- School finance
- Career ladders, teacher licensing
- Administrator training
- Adult literacy
- Endowed chairs for college teachers
- At-risk youth: early intervention

CONNECTICUT (2)

- Professional standards for teachers
- Minority teachers
- Tuition savings investment program
- School finance: equalization aid
- Special student populations
- Student public service incentives

DELAWARE (1)

- Teacher salaries
- School finance: equity
- School facility repairs

FLORIDA (3)

- Professionalization of teaching
- At-risk students
- Instructional aids
- Preservice teacher education
- Financial aid
- State funding for private institutions
- School funding: adequacy, equity
- Early Childhood Education: indigent children
- Minority students in higher education

GEORGIA (3)

- Local boards of education: taxes
- University System funding
- Professionalization of teaching
- Student evaluation
- AIDS and sex education
- Adult literacy
- Funding for special programs
- Education information network

HAWAII (3)

- Choice
- Department of Education assessment
- Facility repair and maintenance
- Federal Impact Funds
- State Board of Education
- Higher education institutes: economic development, governance
- Education initiatives
- Funding: K-12, higher education

IDAHO (2)

- Funding: general education
- Transportation funding: state share
- Idaho Education Agencies
- Teacher salaries

- Administrator training requirements
- Endowment lands

ILLINOIS (2)

- Funding: adequacy, state revenues
- Tuition levels for higher education
- Teacher training
- Chicago school reform
- Local property taxes

INDIANA (2)

- Education reform amendments
- Teacher retirement
- State superintendent appointment
- Funding for textbooks
- Special education
- Teacher quality programs
- At-risk students

IOWA (2)

- Teacher training
- School reorganization standards
- Restructuring school districts
- At-risk students

KANSAS (2)

- Funding: K-12, Higher Education
- Higher Education governance
- State Board of Education
- Special education
- At-risk students

KENTUCKY (2)

- Funding: adequacy, consolidation
- Teacher standards
- School performance standards
- Teacher retirement

LOUISIANA (2)

- Funding: adequacy, state revenues
- Teacher salary, evaluation
- Formula revision

MAINE (2)

- Teacher salaries, training
- Early childhood education
- Funding: state share
- School entrance age

MARYLAND (2)

- Higher education: governance, funding
- Teacher salaries and incentives
- Gifted students
- Funding for facilities: state share

MASSACHUSETTS (2)

- Funding reform initiatives
- School improvement incentives
- Teacher training and certification
- Financial aid

MICHIGAN (3)

- School finance: state revenues
- Early childhood education
- Dropout prevention
- Supervision of non-public schools
- Teacher and student testing
- Undergraduate education reform
- Violence in urban schools

MINNESOTA (3)

- Assessing educational goals
- Voucher legislation
- School district reorganization
- Financial aid, prepaid tuition
- Finance formula: district funds
- Special education
- Community college governance
- University of Minnesota improvement

MISSISSIPPI (4)

- Teacher salaries
- Finance: equity, formula
- School superintendents, school board
- Higher education funding
- Higher education reorganization
- Formula for two year institutions
- At-risk students: compensatory education
- Minority teachers

MISSOURI (2)

- Funding: special programs, foundation formula
- General obligation bonds
- Higher education funding
- Financial aid: prepaid tuition
- Review and maintenance of reforms

MONTANA (1) *

- School finance: equity
- Student assessment

NEBRASKA (1)

- School reorganization
- Universities: economic development
- School finance

NEVADA (2) *

- Class size reduction K-3
- Special education funding
- Vocational education
- Mandatory kindergarten
- AIDS and sex education

NEW HAMPSHIRE (2)

- Special education funding
- Public kindergarten
- School building aid
- AIDS education, admission policy
- Illiteracy and dropouts

NEW JERSEY (3)

- State funding: equity
- Bilingual education
- Higher education assessment

NEW MEXICO (2)

- Education reform: momentum, funds
- Minority education
- Funding for facilities
- Higher education funding

NEW YORK (3)

- Higher education funding
- Financial aid
- Minority college students
- Undergraduate education
- Accountability
- School facilities
- Preschool for the handicapped

NORTH CAROLINA (4)

- Chief State School Officer
- State Board of Education
- Career ladders
- Funding of Basic Education Program
- Home school regulation

NORTH DAKOTA (2) *

- Funding: equity, state share
- Funding mechanisms for K-12
- Funding for higher education

OHIO (2)

- Funding: equity, emergency funds, special programs
- State revenues, property taxes
- Adult continuing education
- Abolishing Corporal Punishment

OKLAHOMA (1)

- Teacher salaries
- Accountability
- Choice
- Teacher education

OREGON (2) *

- School finance: local taxes
- At-risk students
- Early childhood education
- Special education funding
- Higher education governance
- School boards governance

PENNSYLVANIA (2)

- Funding
- Local tax reform
- Agency shop for teachers
- Special education: personnel
- Assessment of past reforms

RHODE ISLAND (2)

- Literacy and dropouts

SOUTH CAROLINA (2)

- Education reform review
- Funding
- School transportation and facilities
- Adult literacy
- Teacher salaries

SOUTH DAKOTA (2)

- Teacher salaries
- Funding: state aid
- Special education funding

TENNESSEE (2)

- Teacher salaries
- AIDS education, admission policy
- Class size reduction K-3
- Career ladders

TEXAS (1) *

- At-risk students and dropouts
- Equitable funding
- Higher education institutions

UTAH (2)

- School Libraries
- Funding: taxes
- Consolidation
- Higher education funding
- Teacher training and assessment
- Education reform: staffing

VERMONT (1)

- Vocational education: governance, funds
- Special education
- Redistricting school districts

VIRGINIA (2)

- School standards
- Family life and AIDS education
- Literacy and dropouts

WASHINGTON (3)

- Teacher salaries
- Higher education master plan
- AIDS education, admission policy
- Monitoring past legislation

WEST VIRGINIA (2)

- State aid formula
- Pay raises for education personnel
- Funding: K-12 and higher education
- Accountability: K-12, higher education
- Teacher accreditation

WISCONSIN (3)

- Abolishing corporal punishment
- School finance: property taxes
- Higher education institutes: governance, funds
- Teacher training
- Accountability: students, teachers
- Minority students and faculty
- Higher education faculty salaries

WYOMING (2)

- Funding: foundation programs, equity
- Special education funding
- Vocational education funding
- Uniform school district accounting

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